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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 4265
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 4598
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 6028
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6879
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1659
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002613

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR CU BL

SUBJECT: EVO-CUBA LOVEFEST: YESTERDAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER

REF: LA PAZ 2581

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Bolivian President Evo Morales has turned up the anti-U.S. rhetoric in the last two weeks, making increasingly virulent demands that the incoming Obama Administration change course on Cuba or face the wide-spread expulsion of U.S. Ambassadors from Latin American countries (Bolivia already expelled its U.S. Ambassador). Morales also demanded the OAS reinstate Cuba or face the creation of an alternative organization sans the "empire." Cuban Ambassador to Bolivia Rafael Dauza has accompanied Morales on his latest anti-U.S. rounds and has underscored the Cuban alternative to the United States, both as a development assistance model and as a political system to "predatory" capitalism. We suspect the rhetoric upswing against us may be presaging U.S. mission staff or agency expulsions. End Summary.

Morales' Culture of Dialogue Turns to Demands

¶2. (U) Bolivian President Evo Morales and Cuban Ambassador to Bolivia Rafael Dauza delivered blistering anti-U.S. speeches December 18 during a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Morales' comments included calls to boycott the OAS until they readmit Cuba and a call for Latin American countries to expel their respective U.S. Ambassadors pending a lifting of the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, repeating appeals he made during a December 18 Unasur meeting in Brazil. At the summit in Brazil, Morales said "It would be important ... to give the new U.S. government a deadline to lift the economic blockade (on Cuba). If the new government doesn't do that, (I propose that) we lift the ambassadors." Morales read part of the OAS resolution expelling Cuba, also a rerun from the Unasur conference, explaining the decision to "exclude" and "marginalize" Cuba for its Marxist Leninist direction. Morales proposed a new organization in order to "free all of America" from the presence of the United States. He concluded that "no more" should governments be expelled from the OAS for "thinking differently than the North American empire."

Evo Presses Change to U.S. Cuba Policy

¶3. (C) Morales repeatedly praised Cuban assistance as "unconditional," a dig at U.S. assistance, which his administration has frequently blasted as being used to undermine or even overthrow the Bolivian government. Morales claimed that the Cuban government spent \$45 million to "unconditionally" educate and train more than 5,000 Bolivian students in Cuba. Morales urged South American countries to "work harder and consciously to make the new U.S. government change its Cuba policy."

Evo Heart Fidel Forever

¶4. (U) Morales lauded Fidel Castro for his "steadfastness in his struggle against North American Imperialism." He added that Fidel Castro is "impressive, Fidel is unstoppable, (he) is immortal. ... in the past, in the present and forever. This is Fidel, just as Che" (Ernesto Guevara). Morales asserted that Fidel Castro's example provided Bolivia "an example that permits us today to construct a democratic revolution." He contrasted the "humanitarian" emphasize of the Cuban administration on health and education with "predatory capitalism." Both Morales and Dauza used the opportunity to plead for the release of five Cubans jailed in the United States for espionage.

Dauza Touts Cuban Alternative; Hardship vs. 5 Stars

¶5. (U) Dauza closed his remarks by shouting, "Long live coca, death to Yankees," a familiar Morales refrain, in indigenous Aymara. Dauza compared the favorable work of Cuban medical and literacy volunteers in Bolivia to the "mistreatment" of the "empire" toward the Morales administration and Castro regimes. "We do not ask for anything in exchange (unlike the United States); our cooperation volunteers do not lodge in five-star hotels. We live with the Bolivians, we suffer their hardships."

¶6. (U) Dauza compared the "arrogance" and "domineering" posture of the United States' embargo on Cuba with the suspension of U.S. ATPDEA benefits, the suspension of which went into effect December 15. With Cuba as the model, Dauza urged Bolivians to close ranks around Morales to withstand an implied coming U.S. measures against Morales. "The best way to honor the Cuban Revolution is to keep fighting in the trenches (for Morales)." Dauza added that Cuba would "continue to help" the Bolivian people through Cuban assistance projects, which he credited for 5,400 scholarships (largely medical), 300,000 eye surgeries, and 6.8 million energy-saving light bulbs (Note: For a more detailed listing of Cuban assistance and bilateral relations, see reftel. End Note.)

Unnamed Critics Agree, Evo vs. Goliath Regional Hit

¶7. (U) In comments made earlier December 18 to supporters in Tarija Department (state), Morales explained he expelled U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg in defense of "Bolivian and Latin American sovereignty." Morales contended that presidents of two unnamed countries, one in the Caribbean the other in Central America, thanked him for ensuring the "gringos respect us." He added another regional leader congratulated him for showing the United States that "a small country like Bolivia can make decisions that dignify all Bolivians."

Comment

¶8. (C) Although Morales has compared Cuba favorably with the United States throughout his tenure as President, often with Ambassador Dauza at his side, post notes that the rhetoric has become more strident and pointed in the last two weeks (reftel). Now Morales is not just mouthing pro-Cuban/anti-U.S. slogans, he is proposing concrete action in solidarity with the Castro brothers and at the explicit

expense of Uncle Sam. We expect to hear more of this December 20, when Evo holds a "mini-summit" to celebrate Bolivia's ostensible status as the third country in Latin America to be free of illiteracy (after Cuba and Venezuela). With a sympathetic cast attending, Morales' anti-empire chest beating is likely: Cuban President Raul Castro, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo (the next stop on for the Cuban literacy program) and OAS Secretary Jose Miguel Insulza, whom Morales recently described as a "compatriot, friend."

¶ 9. (C) We suspect the upswing in anti-U.S. rhetoric, including recent renewed attacks on USAID, may be part of a trajectory leading to new round of action against the United States, perhaps laying the groundwork to expel individuals or an agency for alleged espionage/subversion. We note that over the weekend Morales claimed he would give the new administration an undisclosed period of time to revisit the matter of the ATPDEA trade preferences and the Cuban embargo, but his statements and those of his ministers since then indicate a new sense of urgency that may have moved up the timeline for punitive action against the "empire." After generally positive initial statements regarding the incoming Obama administration, Morales and company may be trying to preempt potential Obama administration criticisms. Morales has scheduled a cabinet meeting for December 24, Christmas Eve, and has historically announced major policy changes during his New Year address. Watch this space. End Comment.
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